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JOFFRE, LYAUTEY, NIVELLE

BY CHARLES JOHNSTON

MARSHAL JOFFRE, relieved of his arduous task of patrolling the western battle-front, several hundred miles long, now takes up a heavier task, as supreme commander. The work on the fighting line, which carried him ceaselessly along its whole extent, from Belgium to Alsace, is very largely one of tactics: of the detail and method of sectional fighting. But there are the supremely difficult questions of strategy also, and especially the strategical problem of correlating the whole vast system of Entente armies and Entente offensive, which includes Africa and Asia, as well as eastern and western Europe. And this correlation has not always been successful. For, while the rapid succession of offensives in Galicia—to relieve Austrian pressure on the Trentino; on the Somme—both to help Russia and to relieve Verdun; and then on the Carso plateau—to take rapid advantage of Austrian weakness, succeeded, there was serious failure at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia, in Serbia and, lastly, in Roumania. And, while none of these failures seriously weakened any of the major Entente Powers, it is undeniable that success at these points, instead of failure, would have definitely forwarded the Entente cause.

Marshal Joffre is eminently qualified to give the wisest counsel here: no man better. For he has seen active service in both Asia and Africa; he knows Russia, the Russian army and its leaders well; he has seen the great English army expand under his eyes to twenty times its original size; he has visited the fine army of Italy. He has, moreover, the large and penetrating insight of a statesman, and his present position, a little removed from the smoke and noise of the conflict, will give him the opportunity, which he lacked before, quietly to weigh and consider the weighty problems which remain to be solved.

We do not sufficiently realize the splendid training that the generals of France have gained, in her great colonial possessions, which stretch from Tonking to Guiana. We have grown accustomed to think of the period following the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 as one of depression and shrinkage for France. In reality, it was the beginning of one of the greatest periods of expansion in her history; for while, in Alsace and eastern Lorraine, she was despoiled of territory covering 5,600 square miles, France built up, in the years immediately following, a colonial empire of nearly five million square miles, more than four times greater than the total of the German colonies at their greatest extent, and containing very rich regions like Tongking (310,000 square miles), some two-thirds of Algeria and Tunis (with a total of 267,846 square miles), the French Congo (553,000 square miles), Madagascar (226,000 square miles), and added greatly to her holdings in West Africa, which now total more than 1,600,000 square miles; there is also an area of a million and a half square miles, not included in the figures cited, in the Sahara and French Sudan, an area by no means all desert, since it has a population of 800,000. When we remember that France herself has an area of 207,000 square miles, we see how great an achievement this is, carried out almost in silence and without advertisement, during the very period we are inclined to think of as one of shrinkage and depression.

Not only has France occupied these vast territories; she has admirably organized and administered them, so that they have already a valuable import and export trade, each more than \$150,000,000 yearly. France has shown herself to possess the golden hand, in dealing with subject populations, as England has, in her best work in the East and Egypt. Indeed, the extent, success and wealth of these French colonies was one of the baits which aroused German cupidity, as was made evident in the negotiations at Berlin, on the eve of the war, between the British Ambassador and the German Chancellor—the discussions which gave to the world the deathless phrase “a scrap of paper”; five days earlier, the German Chancellor assured Sir Edward Goschen that “provided that the neutrality of Great Britain were certain, every assurance would be given to the British Government that the (German) Imperial Government aimed at no territorial acquisitions at the expense of France should they

prove victorious in any war that might ensue." The British Ambassador "questioned His Excellency about the French colonies, and he said that he was 'unable to give a similar undertaking in that respect.'"

Particularly good work, in the colonial field, was accomplished by the late General Gallieni in West Africa, Tongking and Madagascar, as is recorded in his charming books; excellent work was done by Joffre, both in Tongking where, among other things, he organized a very successful industrial exhibition, and on the upper Niger, now linked by a railroad, in part constructed by Joffre, with France's very old colonies on the West African coast. General Roques, who succeeded Gallieni at the French War Ministry, and General Lyautey, who has just taken General Roques' place there, had the same training: the training that made so many great pro-consuls of the British Empire: so many men like the Lawrences, like Cromer and Kitchener.

There is one large and very valuable territory, now practically a part of France's colonial empire, though not yet formally incorporated in it, which has not yet been mentioned: Morocco, at the northwest corner of Africa, over against Spain and Britain's base at Gibraltar, and because of that position, of special importance to these two Powers. Morocco is surrounded on all sides by French territory, of which the old French colony of Algeria is the most valuable and important part; with the consequence that the frontier possessions of the French colonies have been perpetually menaced and disturbed by the chronic anarchy and brigandage which passes for "native rule" in this ancient Moslem realm; at the best, it is really armed tyranny; at the worst, it degenerates into atrocious cruelty. For, fine as the religion of Mahomet may be, in certain ways, it has never taught its devotees how to govern subject populations with anything like justice and humanity, whether in India, in Egypt, in Turkey or in Morocco.

It follows that France had certain interests, certain responsibilities, in Morocco, shared by no other Power. But Germany, and especially the German expansionists, were eager to oust France from Morocco, and make it a German colony. From this motive, two incidents arose, which gravely disturbed the peace of Europe, and brought France and Germany to the verge of war. The first occurred in the early spring of 1905, when France was bringing pressure to bear

on the Sultan, to introduce certain reforms which would temper that "absolute despotism, unrestricted by any laws, civil or religious," which was called the Government of Morocco. At this critical juncture, the German Kaiser suddenly descended, on March 31, on the port of Tangier, and made an inflammatory address, declaring that the Sultan was a free and independent sovereign, not bound to obey any foreign pressure; that sudden and sweeping reforms were undesirable in Morocco; and the German interests in Morocco must be safeguarded. This was followed by a demand for a general European conference to settle the affairs of Morocco.

Germany's action was, and was intended to be, deliberately provocative, the more so that Germany had previously admitted the rights of France to be paramount there. It was a brandishing of the mailed fist, as in China, five years earlier, with its result of rapine and murder of Chinese populations; it was a characteristic piece of sabre-rattling, like that three years later, when Austria violated the Berlin Treaty by seizing Bosnia-Herzegovina, and thus inflamed the already dangerous Serbian question; it was the kind of ill-mannered bullying which was rapidly making the international life of Europe intolerable, with the ugly shadow of German *Weltmacht*. It was an attempt to exercise that world-domination even before it had been established.

A conference was called, at Algeciras, close to Gibraltar, early in 1906. On nearly all the disputed points the majority of the Powers voted with France. Not only Great Britain and Russia, but Germany's ally, Italy, admitted the claim of France to special political interests; even Austria did not always follow Germany.

Germany had failed. It was necessary to try again. She found an opening when, in 1910, a year of constant unrest culminated in the rebellion of the tribes round Fez against the Sultan. By March, Mequinez had been captured by the rebels, a new Sultan proclaimed and Fez invested by considerable forces. On April 26, France, at the Sultan's call for help, sent a force to Fez and the rebellion was suppressed, the Sultan abdicating in favor of his brother, a few months later. This left France stronger in Morocco, and Germany immediately demanded compensatory gains, sending the gunboat *Panther* to the Moroccan port of Agadir to enforce her claims. It was the mailed fist once more. Un-

fortunately, the French Government, inspired thereto by Caillaux, who has more than once proven himself to be the evil genius of France, on this occasion yielded, and, in return for the recognition by Germany of France's dominant interests in Morocco, ceded to Germany the western part of the French Congo, on the frontier of the Cameroons, an area of 107,000 square miles. Happily, this strip has now been brought once more under the tricolor, by the combined French and British victory in the Cameroons.

It was in the midst of this dangerous and explosive Moroccan situation that General Lyautey, the new French War Minister, received his administrative training and accomplished a large and far-reaching success. Lyautey had earlier served under Gallieni, both in Tongking and Madagascar, and proudly boasted that he was "a pupil of Gallieni"; from that very able proconsul he learned the two cardinal points of Gallieni's system: to turn army officers into civil administrators, as soon as they had occupied a territory; and to handle all supplies on the principle which we have since learned, in this country, to call "efficiency."

In north-western Africa, Lyautey served first at Ain-Sefra, capital of one of the districts of Southern Algeria, where the ceaseless turmoil in Morocco across the border threatened to spread its flames into French territory also. He was given an independent command and a free hand, and did his difficult work splendidly. He showed talent of a very high order, not only as a soldier but even more, perhaps, as an administrator, a statesman who, even at that early day, clearly saw France's great opportunity in Morocco.

From 1908, two years after the Algeciras settlement, to 1911, when Germany once more disturbed the peace of Moroccan relations, Lyautey worked steadily and effectively on the Moroccan frontier. When, in 1912, the treaty of Fez created the French protectorate over Morocco (a settlement recognized by England, Russia, Belgium, Spain, Holland, Portugal, Denmark, Austria-Hungary and Germany), the office of Resident-General in Morocco was created on April 28, 1912, and General Lyautey was chosen to fill it, exercising civil and military powers; reporting directly to the Foreign Office in Paris; preserving the dignity of the Sultan, and safeguarding the interests of all nations concerned. The Sultan has palaces at Rabat on the Atlantic, at Mequinez

and Fez in the center of Morocco, and at Marakesh, and visits each of these cities periodically. The seat of the Resident-General is at Rabat on the west coast, where the Sultan for the most part resides. It is very like the British protectorate over Egypt, with a British High-Commissioner acting with the Sultan of Egypt, and is likely to prove as beneficent for the native population.

This was General Lyautey's position when the war was precipitated by the violation of Belgian neutrality on August 4, 1914. France was in the hands of a comparatively weak government, though her army had been splendidly reorganized and strengthened by General Joffre, who, for three years, had been at the head of the General Staff. The Government at Paris, in which the sinister influence of Cailoux (who had alienated to Germany the great Congo tract, since restored to France), was still strong, until Joffre summarily dealt with it, counseled Lyautey to follow a timid policy: to gather all Europeans in the coast towns; to withdraw his garrisons from the more distant southern outposts; and, at the same time, to send as many troops as possible to fight in France.

Lyautey was quite unable to see wisdom in this policy of cowardice, and quite unwilling to carry it out. Instead, while he did send troops, and far more than had been expected, to France, troops had included the gallant Askris who fought so valiantly at the Marne and in so many later battles, Lyautey determined to strengthen and extend his garrisons in the south and on the frontiers, instead of weakening them; and, while the armies of France were winning signal victories in Europe, the Resident-General was carrying on a vigorous campaign in Morocco, not only against refractory tribes of bandits, but against the inflammatory agents of the Kaiser, who, by scattering gold among the Moslems, were seeking, here as in Egypt, Persia, Tripoli and India, to stir up a Jihad, a "holy war" against Christianity, as represented by the Entente Powers. But, thanks to the vigor and wisdom of Lyautey, while the tribesmen grew rich on German gold, the Kaiser did not thereby profit. The strength and prestige of France steadily increased. German troops, in the famous *Feldgrau*, did indeed arrive in Morocco; but they came as prisoners of war, to build roads and railways for the French. The natives of Morocco are not fools; they were well able to grasp the true significance

of this fine object-lesson, displayed for their instruction by the wise Resident-General.

Thus, in General Lyautey's own words, did "Morocco take her place in the war." At a meeting with the leaders of the southern tribesmen, he thus outlined his policy:

To bring to the country the maximum of progress, of security, of social and economic development; to make of Morocco in every way a great state with modern equipment, by utilizing the wonderful resources of her people, who are intelligent, laborious and open to all practical innovations; but, on the other hand, to allow the country to develop according to its own genius, scrupulously respecting its customs, its law, its traditions, its religion, and leaving intact the great ancestral influences which have spontaneously come to the assistance of the French, maintaining positions that have been won in the social hierarchy; in a word, leaving men and things in their places and carefully abstaining from dividing against itself the house of Moroccan society, which has hitherto rested on firm foundations.

This is exactly the traditional policy of England in India; and, as in India, it brought forth fruits of well-being and security to Morocco. So much so that, from September to November, 1915, while trench warfare was at its height in France and the great Champagne offensive was being fought, General Lyautey found time and means to organize an industrial exposition at Casablanca, the most considerable seaport, with a Christian population of 20,000, just as Joffre at an earlier date had organized an exposition in Tongking. The French Government sent two of its representatives, MM. Sarraut and Ferry, to survey the work the Resident-General had so ably accomplished in Morocco, and, in an extended tour of the great province, which is a trifle larger in area than France, they were able to judge of the solidity of the results he had gained. Large contributions of men, to fight in the armies of France, and of Moroccan wheat to feed these armies, confirmed an excellent impression, and, when the French Government was reorganized for victory, the portfolio of war was given to the great soldier-administrator, General Lyautey, who had builded so wisely and so well in Northern Africa.

It was in Northern Africa also, in Algeria, that General Nivelle first saw active service. A boy of fourteen at the time of the Franco-Prussian war, he was too young to take part, with Joffre, Gallieni and Pau, in the fight against the

invader; but not too young to feel deeply the defeat and spoliation of France. He studied both at the École Polytechnique and at Saint-Cyr, and fitted himself to serve with equal proficiency in the infantry, the cavalry and the artillery. He was particularly noted, as a subaltern, for horsemanship, and was a reckless rider in regimental steeplechases. But he finally found his way into the artillery.

In 1900 the Dowager-Empress of China, that magnificent and sinister old woman who was for so many years "the only man in China," counseled thereto, perhaps, by Prince Tuan, had skillfully transformed the semi-revolutionary Boxer organization into a force directed against the foreign residents in China, and had at least connived at their attacks on the foreign legations at Peking. The killing of the German envoy inspired the Kaiser to his famous allocution advising his soldiers to emulate, in punishing China, the exploits of Attila and his Huns, and expeditionary forces were sent through Tien-tsin to the Chinese capital to free the besieged legations. France joined in this expedition, sending a considerable force under General Voyron, and to this force Major Nivelle, as he then was, was attached. The Frenchmen, absolutely setting aside all counsels to savagery, behaved with large constraint and humanity and, when they withdrew, left an excellent name in the Celestial Kingdom. But, before they went, they had a graceful duty to perform, and this duty was entrusted to General Nivelle. This was due, we are told, not only to his high reputation as an officer, but also, in an especial way, to his proved gifts as a linguist. Perhaps his accurate and fluent knowledge of English has been one factor in his choice for his new command. Like Kitchener, General Nivelle can "keep silent in ten languages."

By a singular piece of good fortune, Major Nivelle was moved to record the carrying out of the duty entrusted to him in a group of letters and, from them, we are able to glean a charming impression not only of the manner in which he fulfilled his mission and of the strange sights he saw, but of the character of Robert Nivelle himself, with his fine gift of observation, touched always with keen, gently ironic humor.

First, as to the nature of his mission. The Emperor of Korea had, it seems, supplied horses and cattle and much-desired cigarettes to the French expedition. The horses,

unfortunately, died of glanders; the cattle were eaten; but the cigarettes held good. It became necessary to convey the thanks of France to the Emperor and at the same time to repatriate the 150 Corean drovers, and this was Major Nivelles's double task. He passed, on his way, through the Manchurian harbor of Chinwan-tao. Theoretically, he writes, the harbor should remain ice-free. Practically, it is blocked, particularly when the temperature drops to 24 degrees below zero, as it did when he was there, in January, 1901. Behind a treacherous ice-pack, which ships can approach only at points that are constantly changing place, the sea formed a veritable stew of ice, a gigantic sherbet, which oars could not break into, while the screws of steam-launches churned it in vain. Twenty-four degrees below, and the "yellow wind," that terrible wind from the Mongolian deserts, against which all furs are impotent. Before them a crazy sea lifted the huge ice-blocks to prodigious heights and sent them crashing together with a sinister grinding; to the left and behind them a splendid panorama blurred by the thick yellow dust, the ancient Wall of China, which descends with a thousand capricious windings from the Manchurian mountains, and comes to die there, in the sea: "an unforgettable spectacle; we passed there, on that inhospitable coast, a few hard and beautiful hours which will remain forever present to my memory."

One is tempted to quote endlessly: his observations on Chemulpo, on Korea; but we come to other hours, hard and beautiful, which have made, we may well believe, a still deeper impress on his memory: the opening hours of the great war which has already brought France such undying glory. Colonel Nivelles was then stationed at Besançon under the Juras, in command of the Fifth Artillery, which is a part of the Seventh Army Corps. Ordered into Alsace, with the first French offensive, he was cited in the order of the day for a brilliant exploit: furiously bombarding a group of German guns, he put their artillerymen to flight and captured them all, 24 in number: the first considerable trophy of the war. At the Battle of the Marne, the Seventh Corps with its artillery formed a part of General Maunoury's army, nearest to Paris and facing General von Kluck's right, and Colonel Nivelles's guns had their share in the victory of the Ourcq, which gained such signal praise from the great Commander-in-Chief, as "the fulfillment of

forty-three years of waiting for retribution." When the German armies were driven back upon the Aisne, a specially obstinate counter-attack forced the Seventh Corps to withdraw again to the south of the river. Nivelle, with splendid vigor, seized the right instant, led his batteries out into the open space between pursuers and pursued, let the Germans come close in their serried ranks and then opened fire on them with such deadly precision that few of the 6,000 Germans ever returned to their trenches. In October, 1914, a few weeks later, Nivelle was made a General of Brigade. At the head of his brigade he broke a sudden Teuton drive on Soissons. He was rapidly promoted to the command of a division and then an army corps: the famous Third Corps of Normandy. In April, 1916, when Verdun was hard pressed by the greatest offensive a single army ever organized, General Nivelle was sent to succor the heroic fortress which General Sarraill had so finely defended during the great Battle of the Marne. So determinedly did he play his part there, and with such signal success, that he was, within a few weeks, put in command of the whole Verdun army, when he proceeded to break the back of the Crown Prince's army, at a cost, to Germany, of not less than half-a-million men.

But General Nivelle is no mere defensive fighter. His magnificent exploits, in retaking territory before Verdun, in fewer hours than it had taken months for the Crown Prince to capture it, and at a loss of only one French soldier for each five hundred Germans who had fallen there,—these magnificent exploits are fresh in all our memories. And now, when he tells his men that the method of attack is proven, that the victory of France is absolutely certain, we can see that he has more than made good his words by his acts. One doubts not that, in the early future, we shall see him deal terrible blows, terrible in their force and their precision, for the honor of France, for liberty, for justice, for humanity.

CHARLES JOHNSTON.